

1 INTRODUCTION

Based on preliminary internal U.S. Forest Service (Forest Service) and Placer County (County) scoping, external public scoping, completion of an initial study under the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA), and evaluation of the context and intensity factors contained in Title 36 of the Code of Federal Regulations (CFR) Section 1508.27, the Forest Service and Placer County have determined that a joint environmental impact statement/environmental impact report (EIS/EIR) is necessary to review, analyze, and document the potential effects on the human, physical, and biological environment anticipated to result from the construction, operation, and maintenance of the proposed Squaw Valley | Alpine Meadows Base-to-Base Gondola Project (project). This EIS/EIR analyzes the direct and indirect effects of the alternatives that would occur on both National Forest System (NFS) lands and private lands within Placer County, California. The effects of past, present, and reasonably foreseeable future activities that could interact with effects resulting from implementation of the alternatives are analyzed as cumulative effects.

The National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) applies to federal actions (40 CFR Section 1507.1), including the Forest Service's issuance of an amendment to the proponent's current special use permit (SUP) to authorize the project on NFS lands. Similarly, CEQA applies to discretionary actions of all state, regional, or local agencies (14 California Code of Regulations [CCR] Section 15002[b][1]–[2]), including Placer County's issuance of a conditional use permit and amendment of the *Squaw Valley General Plan and Land Use Ordinance* (SVGPLUO) (Placer County 2006). Both NEPA and CEQA encourage cooperation between federal, state, and local agencies to reduce duplication of the NEPA and CEQA processes (40 CFR Section 1506.2 and 14 CCR Section 15221). In this manner, the Forest Service and Placer County are co-leading the development of this joint EIS/EIR. Squaw Valley Ski Holdings, LLC (SVSH) is the project proponent.

After publication of the Draft EIS/EIR for the Squaw Valley | Alpine Meadows Base-to-Base Gondola Project, installation of Gazex facilities for avalanche mitigation was removed as a component of the project by the proponent, SVSH. At this time, installation of a gondola connecting the Squaw Valley and Alpine Meadows base areas is a higher priority for SVSH than installation of Gazex facilities to supplement existing avalanche mitigation techniques at Alpine Meadows. Existing avalanche mitigation techniques utilized by snow safety personnel at Alpine Meadows, including use of hand-charges, Avalaunchers, and the 105-millimeter Howitzer, provide effective and efficient means for reducing avalanche risk at the resort to a level that is acceptable for recreational use by guests. SVSH will continue to evaluate the efficacy of Gazex facilities for avalanche mitigation, as well as other, new forms of avalanche mitigation that are emerging as leading technologies in the field, for potential implementation in the future.

All changes made to text and tables in this Final EIS/EIR since publication of the Draft EIS/EIR, including those related to removal of Gazex facilities from the proposal, are identified in this Final EIS/EIR. All changes made to this EIS/EIR after publication of the Draft EIS/EIR are identified in this Final EIS/EIR with a vertical line in the margin, directly next to any text changes. To identify exact changes that occurred between the Draft EIS/EIR and the Final EIS/EIR, view the two documents side-by-side, navigate to any text in the Final EIS/EIR with a vertical line in the margin, and compare that text with the same section in the Draft EIS/EIR.

Changes made to the Final EIS/EIR after publication of the Draft EIS/EIR include but are not limited to:

- ▲ the removal of Proposed Action text identifying and explaining the Gazex facilities component of the project, as well as any mention of new Gazex facilities throughout the resource analysis sections;
- ▲ the modification of effects analysis that was initially conducted with the assumption that Gazex facilities would be included in the proposal;

- ▲ clarification and enhancement of several Resource Protection Measures (RPMs) reflecting input provided by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service during the Tahoe National Forest's (TNF's) Endangered Species Act consultation for Sierra Nevada yellow-legged frog;
- ▲ various edits made in response to detailed public comments submitted during the Draft EIS/EIR public comment period; and
- ▲ other, minor edits related to syntax or grammatical errors throughout the document.

Identifying revisions with vertical lines in the margin was not possible for exhibits, so this paragraph summarizes the revisions made to the exhibits. The primary reason for revising exhibits was to remove reference to Gazex exploders and their related features. Exhibit 2-7, "Typical Gazex Exploder," and Exhibit 2-8, "Typical Gazex Shelter," were removed, and the remaining exhibits in Chapter 2 were renumbered accordingly. The following exhibits were retained, but elements and text referring to Gazex exploders and related features were removed (numbering reflects removal of Exhibits 2-7 and 2-8):

- ▲ Exhibit 1-2, "Gondola Alignments Associated with Each Alternative"
- ▲ Exhibit 2-1, "Topographic Map of Gondola Alignment Associated with Each Action Alternative"
- ▲ Exhibit 2-2, "Overview of Gondola Alignment and Construction Access Route under Alternative 2"
- ▲ Exhibit 2-3, "Close-up of Alpine Meadows Base Terminal under Alternative 2, along with Tower Zones A and B"
- ▲ Exhibit 2-4, "Close-up of Alpine Meadows Mid-Station under Alternative 2, along with Tower Zones B and C"
- ▲ Exhibit 2-7, "Overview of Gondola Alignment and Construction Access Route under Alternative 3"
- ▲ Exhibit 2-8, "Close-up of Alpine Meadows Base Terminal under Alternative 3"
- ▲ Exhibit 2-11, "Overview of Gondola Alignment and Construction Access Route under Alternative 4"
- ▲ Exhibit 2-12, "Close-up of Alpine Meadows Base Terminal under Alternative 4"
- ▲ Exhibit 3-1, "Cumulative Projects"
- ▲ Exhibit 4.2-3, "Viewpoint Locations"
- ▲ Exhibit 4.3-1, "Tower Construction Overview"
- ▲ Exhibit 4.4-1, "Forest Plan Management Areas in the Project Area, including Management Area 086 – Scott (Scott Management Area)"
- ▲ Exhibit 4.4-2, "Existing Local Land Use Designations"
- ▲ Exhibit 4.4-3, "Existing Local Zoning Designations"
- ▲ Exhibit 4.9-1, "Existing Noise and Vibration Sensitive Land Uses and Proposed Project Components"
- ▲ Exhibit 4.14-1, "Aquatic Resources in the Study Area"
- ▲ Exhibit 4.14-2, "Sierra Nevada Yellow-Legged Frog Critical Habitat in the Study Area"
- ▲ Exhibit 4.15-1, "Wetland Habitats"

- ▲ Exhibit 4.16-1, “Topography of Project Area”
- ▲ Exhibit 4.16-3, “Geology of Project Area”
- ▲ Exhibit 4.16-4, “Soils of Project Area”
- ▲ Exhibit 4.17-2, “Hydrology Features”

1.1 BACKGROUND

The Squaw Valley Ski Area (Squaw Valley) and Alpine Meadows Ski Area (Alpine Meadows) are separate ski facilities northwest of Lake Tahoe. They are proximate to each other, and are both under ownership of, and operated by, the project proponent. One lift ticket (or season pass) provides access to both facilities. Squaw Valley and Alpine Meadows each offer a different winter sports and resort amenity experience. Between the two ski areas, Squaw Valley has a higher percentage of advanced/expert terrain and more resort amenities (e.g., accommodations, restaurants, shopping, entertainment). Alpine Meadows, however, has more beginner and intermediate terrain and limited amenities. A shuttle bus currently provides roadway access between the ski areas throughout the day. This interresort access is often considered inconvenient because it requires skiers/boarders to exit the mountain, walk with their equipment to the shuttle stop, wait up to 30 minutes for the shuttle, and travel approximately 15 minutes to the shuttle stop at the other ski area. The project is being proposed to enhance the visitor experience at both Squaw Valley and Alpine Meadows by providing more direct access to existing ski terrain and/or resort amenities via a gondola lift system with limited waiting times to board the gondola and an approximately 16-minute transit time between ski areas. The more direct access would also allow the Squaw Valley ski and snowboard schools improved access to the beginner terrain at Alpine Meadows.

In September 2015 and October 2015, the TNF and County, respectively, accepted applications from SVSH to install, operate, and maintain an aerial ropeway system (gondola) connecting the Squaw Valley and Alpine Meadows ski areas. The original proposal also included an alteration of current avalanche mitigation techniques through the installation of eight Gazex exploders along or near a segment of the Alpine Meadows side of the proposed gondola alignment. However, as described above, Gazex was removed from the proposal after publication of the Draft EIS/EIR. Implementation of the proposal would require an amendment to the existing Forest Service SUP issued for the operation and maintenance of Alpine Meadows. The proposal is consistent with the *Alpine Meadows Ski Area Master Development Plan* (Tahoe National Forest 2015) and passed the screening criteria for consideration to use NFS lands and amend the existing permit consistent with Forest Service land use regulations. Permitting from the County includes a conditional use permit and General Plan amendment to the SVGPLUO (Placer County 2006) to allow for a new ski lift.

Alpine Meadows conducts its operations—including the lift and trail network, guest service facilities, infrastructure, and other assets—on private, state, and NFS lands administered by TNF in Placer County. Located in the Lake Tahoe region, Alpine Meadows is approximately 3.3 miles west of State Route (SR) 89, about 7 miles northwest of Tahoe City, and about 13 miles south of Truckee.

Squaw Valley conducts its operations—including the lift and trail network, guest service facilities, infrastructure, and other assets—almost entirely on private lands in Placer County. Approximately 195 acres of Squaw Valley’s operation are under Forest Service SUP on NFS lands. No portions of the infrastructure and improvements included in the alternatives would be located on NFS lands at Squaw Valley. Squaw Valley is approximately 2.5 miles west of SR 89, about 9 miles northwest of Tahoe City, and about 11 miles south of Truckee. At the closest point, Squaw Valley is approximately 1.2 miles from Alpine Meadows. Refer to Exhibit 1-1 below for a regional map of the project area.

1.2 RELATIONSHIP TO PREVIOUS ANALYSES AND APPROVALS

This EIS/EIR is consistent with and incorporates by reference several documents that are related to the management of Squaw Valley and Alpine Meadows:¹

- ▲ 1990 TNF Land and Resource Management Plan (LRMP) (U.S. Forest Service 1990),
- ▲ 2004 Sierra Nevada Forest Plan Amendment Supplemental Environmental Impact Statement and Record of Decision (ROD) (U.S. Forest Service 2004a, 2004b),
- ▲ 2015 *Alpine Meadows Ski Area Master Development Plan* (Tahoe National Forest 2015), and
- ▲ 2016 Village at Squaw Valley Specific Plan Final EIR (Placer County 2016).

1.3 PURPOSE AND NEED AND PROJECT OBJECTIVES

NEPA, the federal environmental review process, requires an EIS to briefly describe the underlying purpose and need for the federal lead agency's proposed and alternative actions (40 CFR 1502.13). Similarly, CEQA, the state environmental review process, requires an EIR to contain a statement of the goals and objectives of the project proponent in proposing the project and alternatives. Although the NEPA purpose and need and CEQA project objectives serve similar functions (that is, to explain why the project is being considered and assist in the decision-making process), the Forest Service and Placer County have different statutory obligations and authorities regarding this element of environmental review and decision making and thus have separate needs and objectives.

This section presents a purpose and need statement and list of objectives that meets the requirements of both NEPA and CEQA.

1.3.1 Forest Service Purpose and Need

The Forest Service's purpose for the project is to improve developed winter recreation opportunities in the Scott Management Area, consistent with the LRMP. SUPs, and amendments to SUPs, are issued by the Forest Service and are required by law to be consistent with the LRMP. Desired future conditions for recreation management in the LRMP relevant to the alternatives direct the TNF to "provide a variety of opportunities for developed and dispersed recreation experiences" (U.S. Forest Service 1990:V-5). The Alpine Meadows SUP, which applies to the Scott Management Area, allows for development of additional winter sports facilities and support services as part of the desired future condition of the management area (U.S. Forest Service 1990:V-446-449).

The TNF needs to respond to SVSH's land use application, which proposes amendment of its SUP to improve connectivity between Alpine Meadows and Squaw Valley. The need, as expressed by SVSH, for improved connectivity between the ski areas is based on several factors. The developed snow sports trail network at Squaw Valley has limited terrain suitable for beginners and teaching; Alpine Meadows has additional intermediate and beginner terrain. Squaw Valley has more resort amenities (e.g. accommodations, restaurants, shopping, entertainment); Alpine Meadows, in contrast, has limited amenities. Although guests can currently access both ski areas on the same lift ticket, they must drive or ride a shuttle bus between the two areas to access all the different terrain and amenities offered at both locations.

¹ These documents are part of the project file for this EIS/EIR and are available for review at the Truckee Ranger District Office and the Placer County Tahoe City Office.

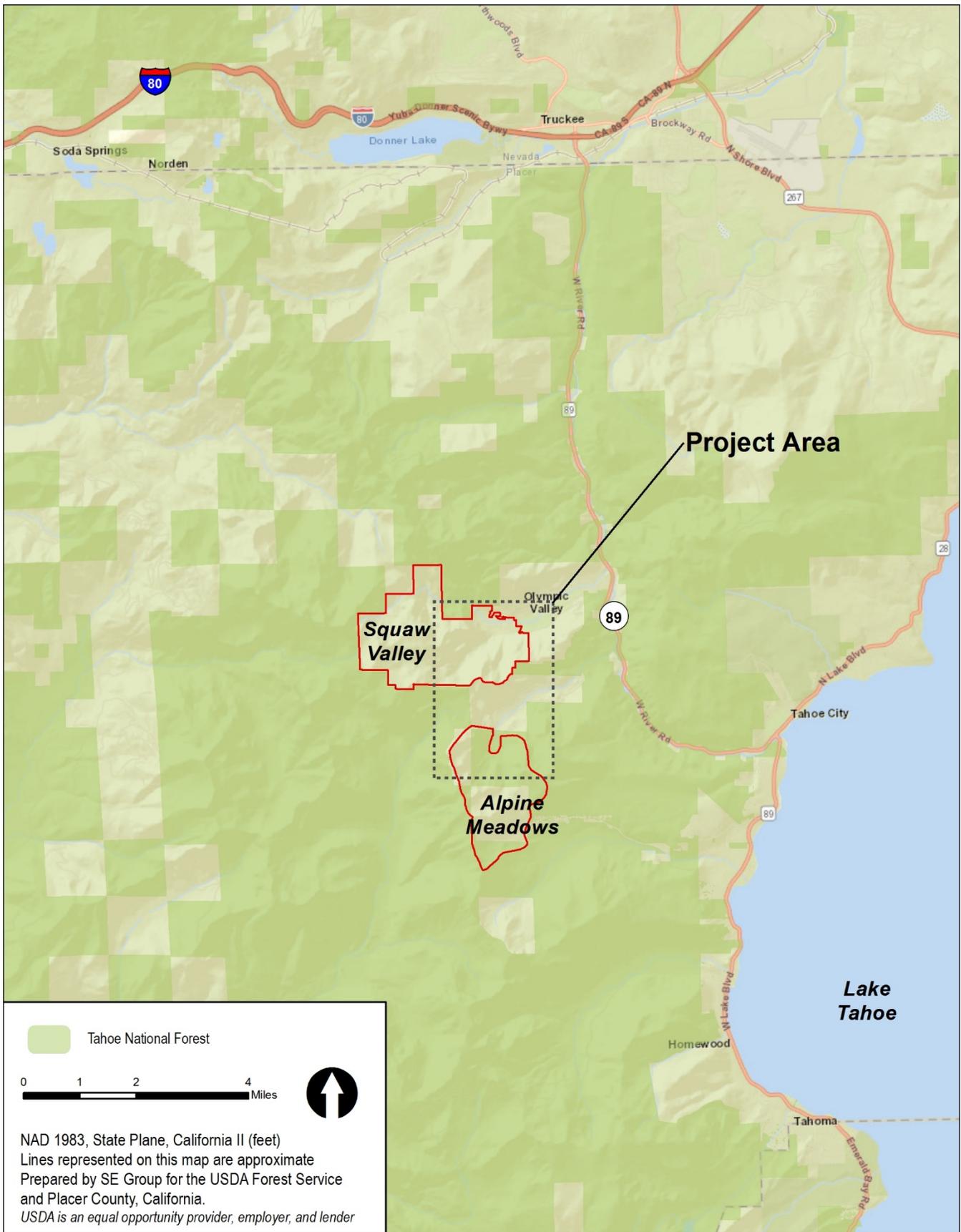


Exhibit 1-1 Regional Map of Project Area

1.3.2 CEQA Project Objectives

Placer County's responsibility under CEQA is predicated upon the review of an application for a conditional use permit and SVGPLUO amendment. Consideration of these actions is a discretionary decision by the County and qualifies as a project under CEQA. Under CEQA, an EIR must include a statement of objectives of the proposed project.

The overall purpose of the project is to enhance the visitor wintertime experience at both Squaw Valley and Alpine Meadows by providing direct connection between the ski areas for more convenient access to skiable terrain and resort amenities.

The project has the following objectives²:

1. Enhance the visitor experience at Squaw Valley and Alpine Meadows by providing easy, and potentially faster, interresort access to terrain and amenities at both ski areas.
2. Reduce visitor and resort shuttle system travel on roadways between the resorts.
3. Provide opportunities for skiers to offload at mid-stations to provide easier access to existing skiable terrain.
4. Provide a system where the gondola segment between the Squaw Valley base terminal and mid-station can operate independently from the remainder of the gondola so that this segment can potentially function as a ski lift if the remainder of the gondola is not operational because of weather, maintenance, or other factors.
5. Use a facility alignment that allows vehicles and equipment to reach gondola cabins from the ground to evacuate people from the cabins, if necessary, during an emergency situation.

1.4 SUMMARY OF THE ALTERNATIVES

NEPA and CEQA require the analysis of a reasonable range of alternatives that meet the purpose and need/objectives of the project (40 CFR Section 1502.14[a] and 14 CCR Section 15126.6[a]). The Forest Service and Placer County have identified the following four alternatives: Alternative 1 – No Action Alternative, Alternative 2 – Proposed Action Alternative, Alternative 3, and Alternative 4. These alternatives are described in greater detail in Chapter 2, "Description of the Alternatives."

Alternatives were developed, in part, in response to issues identified internally by the Forest Service and Placer County, and externally by the public during the scoping process. Alternative 3 addresses issues such as proximity to the Granite Chief Wilderness and proximity to occupied habitat for Sierra Nevada yellow-legged frog at Barstool Lake. Alternative 4 addresses issues such as proximity to the Granite Chief Wilderness, visibility of the project, and proximity to residences.

1.4.1 Alternative 1 – No Action Alternative

The No Action/No Project Alternative, required by NEPA and CEQA (40 CFR 1502.14 and 14 CCR Section 15126.6[e]), provides a baseline for comparing the effects of the action alternatives. NEPA uses the term

² The Draft EIS/EIR included a 6th project objective related to avalanche mitigation technology (Gazex); however, that objective was removed from the Final EIS/EIR because the project was modified to remove the proposed Gazex facilities from the proposal.

“No Action Alternative,” and CEQA uses the term “No Project Alternative.” For the purposes of this EIS/EIR, the term “No Action Alternative” is used for both NEPA and CEQA. Under the No Action Alternative, neither the Forest Service nor Placer County would provide authorizations to SVSH to construct a gondola. The No Action Alternative essentially reflects a continuation of existing interresort transportation management practices without changes, additions, or upgrades. The existing shuttle system between Squaw Valley and Alpine Meadows would continue to operate. The gondola connecting Alpine Meadows and Squaw Valley would not be implemented under the No Action Alternative, and existing conditions would not be changed at the project site.

1.4.2 Alternative 2

Alternative 2 would be located at Section 31, Township 16N, Range 16E; Section 5, Township 15N, Range 16E; and Section 8, Township 15N, Range 16E (see Exhibit 1-2 for a map of the gondola alignments associated with each action alternative). This alternative includes amendment of the Alpine Meadows SUP, issuance of a conditional use permit, rezone to accommodate the Alpine Meadows base terminal, and amendment of the SVGPLUO to authorize construction, operation, and maintenance of a gondola connecting Alpine Meadows and Squaw Valley (total length of approximately 13,000 feet) with mid-stations for Alpine Meadows and Squaw Valley located above *the Buttress* area and on the Squaw Saddle, respectively.

1.4.3 Alternative 3

Alternative 3 would be located at Section 31, Township 16N, Range 16E; Section 5, Township 15N, Range 16E; and Section 8, Township 15N, Range 16E (Exhibit 1-2). This alternative includes a gondola connecting Alpine Meadows and Squaw Valley in a different alignment (segments of which would be located further to the east of Alternative 2; total length of approximately 12,600 feet) with a mid-station for Alpine Meadows located on the Caldwell property (private lands located between Squaw Valley and Alpine Meadows ski resorts) and a mid-station for Squaw Valley located on the Squaw Saddle. Alternative 3 includes amendment of the Alpine Meadows SUP, issuance of a conditional use permit, rezone to accommodate the Alpine Meadows base terminal, and amendment of the SVGPLUO.

1.4.4 Alternative 4

Alternative 4 would be located at Section 32, Township 16N, Range 16E; Section 31, Township 16N, Range 16E; Section 5, Township 15N, Range 16E; and Section 8, Township 15N, Range 16E (Exhibit 1-2). This alternative includes a gondola connecting Alpine Meadows and Squaw Valley in a different alignment (the entire alignment further to the east than Alternatives 2 and portions of Alternative 3; total length of approximately 11,700 feet) with a mid-station for Alpine Meadows located on the Caldwell property (private lands located between Squaw Valley and Alpine Meadows ski resorts) and a mid-station for Squaw Valley located on the Squaw Saddle. Alternative 4 includes amendment of the Alpine Meadows SUP, issuance of a conditional use permit, rezone to accommodate the Alpine Meadows base terminal, and amendment of the SVGPLUO.

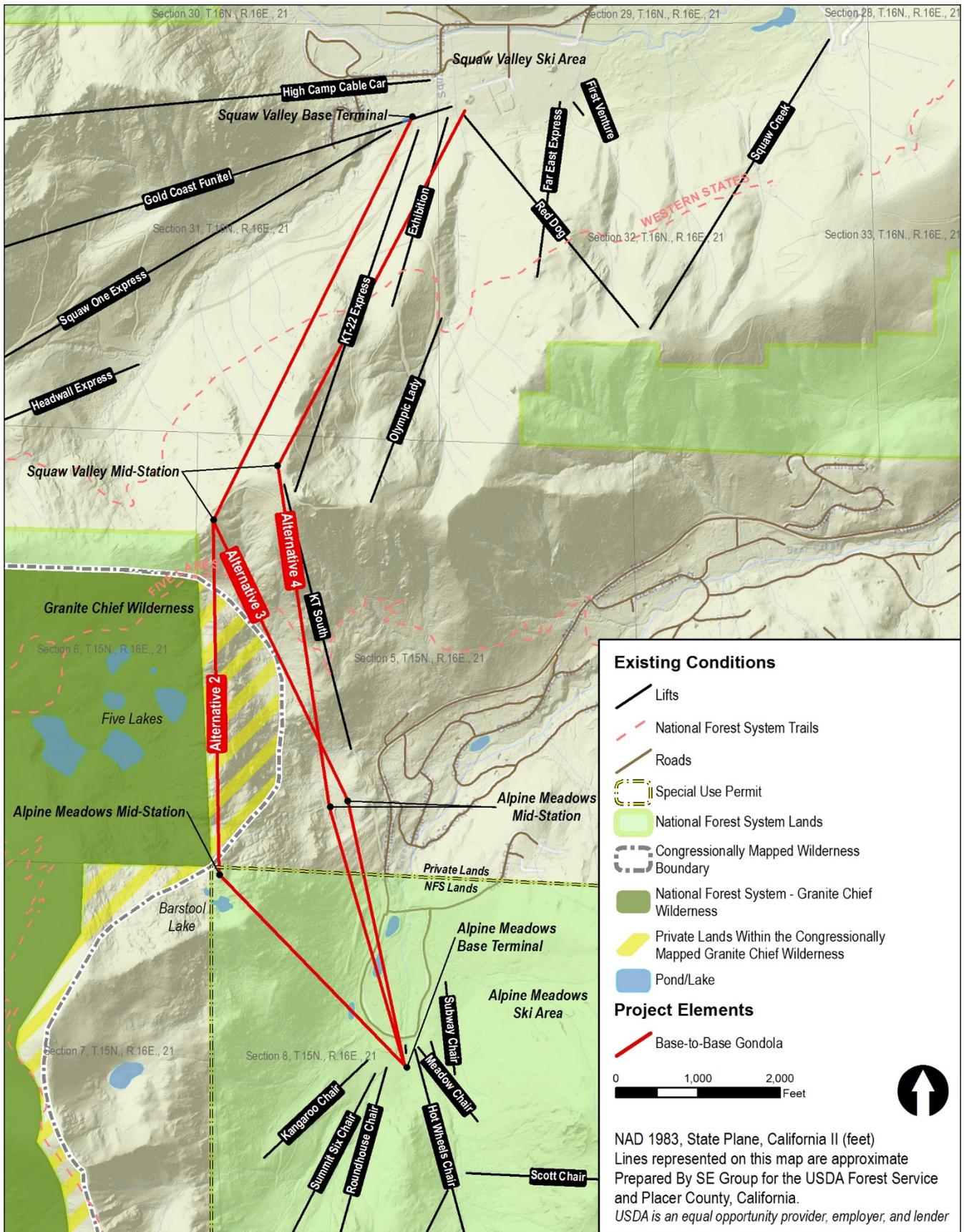


Exhibit 1-2 Gondola Alignments Associated with Each Alternative

1.5 INTERAGENCY COORDINATION

In accordance with regulatory direction—and in furtherance of cooperative management among federal agencies charged with oversight of environmental and natural resources—federal, state, local, and tribal entities with a likely interest in and/or jurisdiction over the project were sent scoping notices, EIS/EIR materials, and/or consulted before and throughout the NEPA/CEQA process.

Under NEPA regulations, any federal or public agency, other than the lead agencies, that has jurisdiction or special expertise relative to a project may request to be a cooperating agency in the NEPA process. No requests from any federal or public agencies to act as cooperating agencies have been received at the time of this writing.

Under CEQA, a responsible agency is a public agency that proposes to carry out or approve a project, for which a lead agency is preparing or has prepared an EIR or negative declaration. The term *responsible agency* includes all public agencies other than the lead agency that have discretionary approval power over the project. Examples of agencies that could act as responsible agencies for the project include the California Department of Fish and Wildlife, the Lahontan Regional Water Quality Control Board, and the Placer County Air Pollution Control District.

1.6 PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT

1.6.1 Scoping

Scoping is an open process to determine the scope of issues to be addressed in an environmental document (40 CFR 1501.7). Under NEPA, the scoping process remains open throughout project planning, whereas, under CEQA, the scoping process is typically limited to a 30-day period following publication of the notice of preparation (NOP) to allow time for issues to be addressed.

In accordance with NEPA regulations (40 CFR Section 1508.22), the Forest Service initiated the scoping comment period by publishing a notice of intent in the *Federal Register* on April 29, 2016, with a designated scoping period ending on May 31, 2016. In accordance with CEQA (14 CCR Section 15082), Placer County published an NOP with the State Clearinghouse on April 22, 2016, with a 30-day review period ending on May 23, 2016.

The Forest Service prepared a scoping package containing a brief description of the Proposed Action, description of the purpose of and need for the action, and two illustrative maps. The package was distributed to 51 individuals and organizations. Placer County prepared the CEQA Initial Study Checklist for the project, which included a brief description of the project and project objectives and an initial evaluation of potential environmental effects. The Initial Study Checklist and NOP were posted on the Placer County project website (Initially posted at: <https://placer.ca.gov/departments/communitydevelopment/envcoordsvcs/eir/squawvalleygondolaproject>; currently available at: <https://www.placer.ca.gov/2680/Squaw-Valley-Alpine-Meadows-Base-to-Base>) and mailed to individuals and organizations on the mailing list.

Two joint Forest Service and Placer County public scoping meetings were held on May 9, 2016. Both meetings were held at the Resort at Squaw Creek, Monument Peak Room, 400 Squaw Creek Road, Olympic Valley, California. The first meeting was held from 2:00 to 4:00 p.m., and the second was held from 6:00 to 8:00 p.m. Individuals were able to obtain information and submit comments at this public scoping meeting. Scoping comments were also accepted through mail, fax, telephone, and email and through the Forest Service project website. On the Forest Service project website, an e-mail address and comment form were provided for submitting electronic comments.

Following the close of the public scoping period, the Forest Service and Placer County decided to combine the NEPA/CEQA processes and produce a joint EIS/EIR. The Forest Service and Placer County announced this change through a press release and revised NOP published on September 2, 2016, and Placer County accepted additional scoping comments until October 3, 2016.

The notices and scoping materials are included in Appendix A.

1.6.2 Public Review of the Draft EIS/EIR

The Draft EIS/EIR was distributed to interested agencies, stakeholder organizations, and individuals for a comment period of 45 days, from **April 27, 2018, to June 11, 2018**. This distribution was undertaken to ensure that interested parties had an opportunity to express their views regarding the environmental effects of the project and to ensure that information pertinent to permits and approvals was provided to decision makers. The Draft EIR/EIS was available for review by the public during normal business hours at the Tahoe City and Truckee libraries, Placer County offices in Auburn and Tahoe City, and Tahoe National Forest offices in Nevada City and Truckee. The document was also available online.

A public hearing on the Draft EIS/EIR was conducted on May 24, 2018, as part of the Placer County Planning Commission meeting in Kings Beach, California. A Forest Service open house was conducted on May 22, 2018 at the Truckee Ranger District Office in Truckee, CA.

All comments received on the Draft EIS/EIR during the public comment period, as well as several comments received within two weeks after the close of the comment period, are included along with written responses in Volume 2 of this Final EIS/EIR.

1.6.3 NEPA Comment Submittal

Pursuant to 36 CFR 218.25, comments on the Squaw Valley | Alpine Meadows Base-to-Base Gondola Project Draft EIS/EIR were accepted for 45 days beginning on the first day after the date of publication of the Notice of Availability (NOA) of the Draft EIS/EIR in the Federal Register, which was April 27, 2018.

1.6.4 Distribution of the Final EIS/EIR

This Final EIS/EIR is being distributed to interested agencies, stakeholder organizations, and individuals. The Final EIR/EIS is available for review by the public during normal business hours at the following locations:

Tahoe City Library
740 N. Lake Boulevard
Tahoe City, CA 96145

Truckee Library
10031 Levon Avenue
Truckee, CA 96161

Placer County
3091 County Center Drive, Suite 190
Auburn, CA 95603

Placer County
775 N. Lake Boulevard
Tahoe City, CA 96145

Tahoe National Forest
Supervisor's Office
631 Coyote Street
Nevada City, CA 95959

Tahoe National Forest
Truckee Ranger District
10811 Stockrest Springs Road
Truckee, CA 96161

The Final EIS/EIR is available online at:

<https://www.placer.ca.gov/2680/Squaw-Valley-Alpine-Meadows-Base-to-Base>.

Placer County will hold two public meetings (at the Squaw Valley Municipal Advisory Council [SVMAC] and the North Tahoe Regional Advisory Council [NTRAC]) and two public hearings (Planning Commission and Board of

Supervisors) on the Final EIS/EIR as part of the project decision-making process. The times, dates, and locations of these hearings/meetings will be noticed through the normal County public meeting noticing mechanisms.

Following lead agency consideration of all comments received during public review of the Draft EIS/EIR and circulation of the Final EIS/EIR, each of the lead agencies (the Forest Service and Placer County) will follow their respective agency processes, which are detailed in Section 1.9, “Decisions to Be Made.”

1.6.5 NEPA Objection Provisions

The project is subject to objection pursuant to 36 CFR 218, Subparts A and B. Only those who submitted project-specific written comments during scoping or the Draft EIS/EIR public review and comment period are eligible to file an objection. Issues raised in objections must be based on previously submitted comments unless based on new information arising after the designated comment periods.

Objections must be submitted within 45 calendar days following the publication of a legal notice in Grass Valley’s *The Union* and the *Tahoe World*. The publication date in the newspaper of record is the exclusive means for calculating the time to file an objection. Those wishing to object should not rely upon dates or timeframes provided by any other source. It is the objector’s responsibility to ensure evidence of timely receipt (36 CFR 218.9).

Objections must be submitted to the reviewing officer: Regional Forester, USDA Forest Service; Attn: Base to Base Gondola Project Objection; 1323 Club Drive, Vallejo, CA 94592. Ph. (707) 562-8737. Objections may be submitted via mail, FAX (707-562-9229), or delivered during business hours (M-F 8:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m.). Electronic objections, in common (.doc, .pdf, .rtf, .txt) formats, may be submitted to: objections-pacificsouthwest-regional-office@fs.fed.us with Subject: Base to Base Gondola Project.

Objections must include the following information (36 CFR 218.8[d]): (1) objector’s name and address, with a telephone number, if available; (2) objector’s signature or other verification of authorship; (3) identification of a single lead objector when applicable; (4) project name, Responsible Official name and title, and name of affected National Forest(s) and/or Ranger District(s); (5) reasons for, and suggested remedies to resolve, the objection; and (6) description of the connection between the objection and the objector’s prior comments. Documents incorporated by reference must adhere to 36 CFR 218.8(b).

Following completion of the pre-decisional objection process, the decision may be implemented immediately upon signing of the ROD.

1.7 SCOPE OF THE ANALYSIS

1.7.1 Resources/Issues Addressed in the EIS/EIR

Based on the results of public scoping and analysis contained in the initial study (Appendix A), specific areas of concern have been identified and classified as being “*key issues*,” “*issues*,” or “*resources/issues dismissed from further documentation*.” Both *key issues* and *issues* generally require in-depth analysis and disclosure, and *key issues* may warrant the generation of an alternative. *Resources/issues dismissed from further documentation* are described below in Section 1.7.2. The Forest Service Handbook directs the Forest Service to focus the analysis on *key issues* and include brief rationale for other topics not analyzed in detail.

Under CEQA and in accordance with the State CEQA Guidelines, a lead agency shall focus an EIR discussion on significant environmental effects and may limit discussion on other effects to brief explanations about why they are not significant (Public Resources Code [PRC] Section 21002.1, CCR Section 15128). A determination of

which impacts would be potentially significant was made for this project based on review of the information presented in the initial study prepared for the project and comments received as part of the public scoping process (Appendix A), as well as additional research and analysis of relevant project data during preparation of this EIS/EIR.

The Forest Service and the County have determined that the project has the potential to result in significant environmental impacts on the following resources, which are addressed in detail in this EIS/EIR (see Sections 4.1 through 4.17):

- ▲ Recreation;
- ▲ Visual Resources;
- ▲ Wilderness;
- ▲ Land Use;
- ▲ Socioeconomic and Environmental Justice;
- ▲ Public Safety;
- ▲ Transportation and Circulation;
- ▲ Utilities;
- ▲ Noise;
- ▲ Air Quality;
- ▲ Greenhouse Gas Emissions and Climate Change;
- ▲ Vegetation;
- ▲ Botany;
- ▲ Wildlife and Aquatics;
- ▲ Wetlands;
- ▲ Soils, Geology, and Seismicity; and
- ▲ Hydrology and Water Quality.

“Key issues” that helped inform the development of alternatives include visual resources, wilderness, and Sierra Nevada yellow-legged frog. For example, and as noted above, Alternative 3 addresses issues such as proximity to the Granite Chief Wilderness and proximity to occupied habitat for Sierra Nevada yellow-legged frog at Barstool Lake. Alternative 4 addresses issues such as proximity to the Granite Chief Wilderness, visibility of the project, and proximity to residences. Other issues, including those in the above bulleted list, were also considered in the development of alternatives. See Chapter 2, “Description of Alternatives,” for additional details.

1.7.2 Resources/Issues Dismissed from Further Documentation in This EIS/EIR

Pursuant to NEPA and CEQA, the discussion of potential effects on the environment is focused on those impacts that are potentially significant. *Resources/issues dismissed from further documentation* are beyond the scope of the environmental document; are already decided by law, regulation, or policy; are not relevant to the decision; or are conjectural and not supported by scientific or factual evidence. The use of *issues* to frame environmental analyses under NEPA is outlined in the Forest Service Handbook and Council on Environmental Quality regulations (Forest Service Handbook 1909.15 Section 11.5, Section 12.4, Section 15.24, 40 CFR 1501.7 and 1500.4). Based on a review of the information presented in the Initial Study prepared for the project and comments received as part of the public scoping process (Appendix A) as well as additional research and analysis of relevant project data during preparation of this Draft EIS/EIR, the following were identified as resources that would not experience any potential environmental impacts from the project. Accordingly, these resources are not addressed further in this EIS/EIR, but are identified below with a brief explanation as to why impacts to each resource are not anticipated.

1.7.2.1 Agriculture and Forest Resources (as Defined by CEQA)

There is no agricultural land in the project area, and the project would not be located on or adjacent to farmland. The project area contains pockets of trees that would meet the CEQA definitions of forest land and timberland (PRC Sections 12220(g) and 4526). However, the dispersed removal of individual trees would not result in the loss of forest land or conversion of forest land to a non-forest use. Therefore, no significant impacts related to agriculture or forest resources (as defined by CEQA) would occur and this issue is not discussed further in this EIS/EIR. Potential impacts related to the functions and values provided by trees in the project area are addressed in Section 4.2, “Visual Resources,” and Section 4.12, “Vegetation.”

1.7.2.2 Mineral Resources

There are no identified mineral resource zones in the project area. No loss of availability of a known mineral resource that would be of value to the region and the residents of the state would occur. Further, there are no locally important mineral resource recovery sites delineated on a local general plan, specific plan, or other land use plan that include the project area. Therefore, no impacts to mineral resources would occur and this issue is not discussed further in this EIS/EIR.

1.7.2.3 Cultural Resources

Based on cultural resources surveys of the project area conducted in 2015 and 2016 (which included searches of available records, pedestrian archaeological surveys, and contacts with the local tribal representative), there are no archaeological or historic (e.g., historic buildings, foundations) resources on the site of any of the action alternatives and no evidence of paleontological resources occurring in the project area. As of March 2018, the State Historic Preservation Officer has concurred that no historic properties are listed on, or eligible for listing on, the National Register of Historic Places within the project's area of potential effect, and therefore, no historic properties would be affected by the project.

It is highly unlikely that currently unknown subsurface cultural resources could be located in the area considered for project alternatives given the steep slopes found within of much of the project area, preponderance of exposed granite, and previous ground disturbance in the locations of the base terminals. Although there is no evidence that cultural or paleontological resources occur in the area considered for the project alternatives, there are RPMs that would be applied to all action alternatives addressing the potential for encountering previously unknown cultural and paleontological resources and evaluation and protection of these finds. The role of RPMs in project implementation and minimizing environmental affects is described in more detail in Section 2.2.6, "Resource Protection Measures." All RPMs are provided in Appendix B and those related to cultural and paleontological resources are RPMs CUL-1 through CUL-4.

Assembly Bill (AB) 52 requires consideration of tribal cultural resources (TCRs). AB 52, as provided in PRC Sections 21080.3.1, 21080.3.2, and 21082.3, requires that lead agencies undertaking CEQA review must, upon written request of a California Native American Tribe, begin consultation once the lead agency determines that the application for the project is complete, prior to the issuance of an NOP of an EIR or notice of intent to adopt a negative declaration or mitigated negative declaration.

On December 17, 2015, Placer County sent letters to representatives of the Washoe Tribe of California and Nevada, United Auburn Indian Community of the Auburn Rancheria (UAIC), the Shingle Springs Band of Miwok Indians, and the T'Si-Akim Maidu offering the opportunity to consult.

On January 12, 2016, the Shingle Springs Rancheria forwarded a letter noting they are unaware of cultural resources on the project site but requesting copies of any cultural reports prepared for the project. On February 3, 2016, the Washoe Tribe similarly noted via letter that they are unaware of cultural resources that may be affected by the project but requested any cultural reports prepared for the project. On February 8, 2016, UAIC requested to receive copies of cultural reports prepared for the project as well as any future environmental documents. On February 1, 2018, the County provided all requesting tribes with a copy of the *Cultural Resource Inventory and Evaluation* prepared for the project in December 2017.

On February 1, 2018, the County sent an email confirmation to UAIC that consultation was considered closed as of January 16, 2016. On February 5, 2018, UAIC responded affirmatively via email to the close of consultation. On February 1, 2018, the County sent a similar email confirmation to the Washoe Tribe, and on February 2, 2018 received an affirmative response from the tribe to the close of consultation. On February 1, 2018, the County sent an email to Shingle Springs Rancheria confirming that consultation would be considered closed as of March 5, 2018. No further correspondence has been received from Shingle Springs Rancheria. Therefore, consultation with the tribes resulted in the conclusion that there are no resources on the project site that the tribes consider to be a TCR identified as described under AB 52 and defined in PRC

Section 21074. In addition, no archaeological or historic resources have been identified on the project site. Therefore, the project would have no impact to TRCs as defined in PRC Section 21074.

1.7.2.4 Population and Housing

The project would not include construction of new housing or commercial businesses. Therefore, no direct population growth would result from project implementation. The project would not extend roads or other infrastructure to new areas that would induce growth in new locations. The project's construction effort would be relatively modest and short term (approximately 6–8 months), and is not expected to result in employees relocating to the project area due to this short duration. Approximately 10 new employees (to fill two new full-time, year-round employment positions and eight full-time, seasonal positions) would be needed for project operation during the winter months. This increase in employees would be minimal compared to the seasonal and year-round employee pool available, and is analyzed further in Section 4.5, "Socioeconomics and Environmental Justice." The project would not include removal of any homes or structures. Therefore, no significant impacts related to population and housing would occur and this issue will not be discussed further in this EIS/EIR. The potential for growth-inducing effects, however, is considered, as required by CEQA, in Chapter 5, "Other Required NEPA and CEQA Analyses." Operation of the project would require.

1.7.2.5 Public Services

Although the project may result in an increased number of skiers in the project area, the new gondola would not increase the number of residents or businesses in the project vicinity. The project would have a minimal increase in the demand for fire and police protection services, and the existing fire and police stations and other available fire protection resources in the region (e.g., Forest Service, California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection) are adequately staffed and equipped to provide the level of service needed for the project. Project operation would not require the construction of new, or alteration of existing on-site or off-site fire or police protection facilities or services. Therefore, the project would have a less-than-significant impact on fire and police protection services and this issue will not be discussed further in this EIS/EIR. Potential impacts related to emergency response/rescue are addressed in Section 4.6, "Public Safety."

The nearest school is 1.5 miles from the project area and the project would not directly affect any schools. In addition, the project would not include development of new residences and, therefore, would not result in a substantial effect on the permanent population in the area that would increase the demand for educational services. Project operation would generate two new year-round jobs (i.e., full-time equivalent positions), which would not be sufficient to generate substantial demand for school facilities. Further, schools throughout the region have available capacity. Therefore, no significant impacts related to schools would occur and this issue will not be discussed further in this EIS/EIR. Potential impacts to recreation resources are addressed in Section 4.1, "Recreation."

1.8 CONSISTENCY WITH FOREST SERVICE AND PLACER COUNTY POLICY

1.8.1 Forest Service Policy

SVSH's operations carried out on NFS lands must comply with management direction provided in the LRMP as required by the National Forest Management Act. The LRMP provides two levels of management direction: (1) forestwide direction and (2) area-specific direction. Portions of all action alternatives on NFS

lands are located within the Scott Management Area. The LRMP includes the following direction for development in the Scott Management Area:³

Development of private sector ski area maintenance, operation, and planning will be emphasized during the planning period. This may include development of bed space at the ski base facility. Project-level planning will coordinate increased capacities with off-site capabilities.

As part of this analysis, the project alternatives and purpose and need were reviewed to determine consistency with the forestwide goals and objectives, as well as the specific standards and guidelines for the Scott Management Area. The action alternatives were compared against pertinent forestwide and Scott Management Area standards and guidelines. Consistency with the standards and guidelines is analyzed in relevant sections of Chapter 4.

The purpose and need are consistent with the LRMP General Recreation Standards and Guidelines. The LRMP includes the following guideline for recreation:

Provide a broad spectrum of dispersed and developed recreation opportunities in accordance with identified needs and demands.

The ROD and final Supplemental Environmental Impact Statement for the Sierra Nevada Forest Plan Amendment (SNFPA) amended the LRMP for the Tahoe National Forest and for the 10 other national forests in the Sierra Nevada to improve protection of old forests, wildlife habitats, watersheds, and communities in the Sierra Nevada and Modoc Plateau (U.S. Forest Service 2004a, 2004b). The SNFPA establishes vegetation management practices for the Sierra Nevada to improve forest health throughout the region, as well as provides standards and guidelines applicable to riparian areas, wildlife, botany, and invasive species. The SNFPA does not include management direction specific to recreation projects. Applicable guidance for overstory vegetation removal is incorporated into this analysis.

1.8.2 Placer County Policy

The *Placer County General Plan* (General Plan) (Placer County 2013) provides an overall framework for the development of the County and protection of its natural and cultural resources. A total of 23 community plans have been adopted under the General Plan to provide a more detailed focus on specific geographic areas within the unincorporated County. The goals and policies included within the community plans supplement, but do not supersede, the goals and policies contained within the General Plan. The SVGPLUO (Placer County 2006) and *Alpine Meadows General Plan* (Placer County 1968) are the community plans for Squaw Valley and Alpine Meadows, respectively. Project consistency with these plans is discussed in Section 4.4, "Land Use."

1.9 DECISIONS TO BE MADE

1.9.1 Forest Service Decisions

Based on internal Forest Service scoping and external public scoping as well as on evaluation of the context and intensity factors contained in 40 CFR 1508.27, the Forest Service has determined that an EIS is necessary to review, analyze, and document the potential impacts on the human and biological environment anticipated to result from implementation of the project. This EIS/EIR is a disclosure rather than a decision document, and its purpose is to provide environmental analysis sufficient to support a ROD.

³ A portion of Alternative 2 is located on private lands that are within the Granite Chief Management Area where Forest Service management does not apply to the private lands. Additionally, portions of Alternatives 2, 3, and 4 are located on private lands within the Tinkers Management Area, where Forest Service management also does not apply.

Based on the analysis documented within this EIS/EIR, the Responsible Official, the Forest Supervisor for the TNF, will decide whether to select Alternative 2 (Proposed Action Alternative provided by the applicant), one of the other action alternatives, or the No Action Alternative. Selection of one of the action alternatives would be a decision by the Forest Supervisor to amend Alpine Meadows' existing SUP to authorize the project. However, the Forest Supervisor is not required to choose any of the alternatives described herein but may instead select components of the alternatives. In addition to determining which alternative to select, the Forest Supervisor will determine whether any additional mitigation measures or modifications to the RPMs are required. The Forest Supervisor may require additional mitigation measures or modifications to RPMs not discussed within this document and may require that the mitigation measures or RPMs be monitored beyond the monitoring requirements provided in existing mitigation measures and RPMs. In addition, the Forest Supervisor will decide whether to amend the LRMP.

In compliance with Forest Service Handbook 1909.15 Chapter 18, the Forest Service will continually review the relevancy of the analysis and subsequent decision for new and changed conditions as any other approved projects are advanced for implementation.

1.9.2 Placer County Decisions

As the CEQA lead agency, Placer County is responsible for considering the adequacy of the environmental analysis and determining whether the overall project should be approved. Specifically, the project proponent is requesting the following actions and planning entitlements from Placer County:

- ▲ certification of the Final EIS/EIR,
- ▲ adoption of a mitigation monitoring and reporting program that includes all the RPMs and mitigation measures identified in the Final EIS/EIR,
- ▲ approval of a conditional use permit to allow the proposed gondola as a new conditional use,
- ▲ approval of a rezone from Neighborhood Commercial to Open Space for the Alpine Meadows General Plan, and
- ▲ amendment of the SVGPLUO (Placer County 2006) to add the proposed gondola to the SVGPLUO map(s) of existing and new ski lifts (see additional discussion below).

The SVGPLUO contains text indicating that new ski lifts would be limited to those shown on maps included in the SVGPLUO (i.e., Squaw Valley General Plan Map and the Future Potential Ski Lifts Map). These maps do not include the proposed gondola; therefore, a General Plan amendment would be required. The proposed amendment to the SVGPLUO is also addressed in Section 4.4, "Land Use."

1.10 OTHER NECESSARY PERMITS, LICENSES, AND/OR CONSULTATION

The Forest Service decision would apply only to NFS lands analyzed within this EIS/EIR and would not apply to private property. The Placer County decision would apply to private lands on the project site. Other federal, state, and local entities also may have jurisdiction. Decisions by agencies to issue or not issue approvals related to this proposal may be aided by the analyses presented in this EIS/EIR. Although the Forest Service and Placer County assume no responsibility for enforcing laws, regulations, or policies under the jurisdiction of other governmental agencies, Forest Service and Placer County regulations require permittees to abide by applicable laws and conditions imposed by other jurisdictions. In addition to the requisite Forest Service and Placer County approvals, consultation with the following entities, or permits from these entities, may be required to implement the project:

Federal

- ▲ U.S. Army Corps of Engineers: Compliance with Section 404 of the Clean Water Act if discharge of fill to waters of the United States occurs and /or if any wetlands are identified and cannot be avoided by the project.
- ▲ U.S. Environmental Protection Agency: Concurrence with Clean Water Act Section 404 permit if waters of the United States and wetlands cannot be fully avoided.
- ▲ U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service: Compliance with Section 7 of the federal Endangered Species Act.

State

- ▲ California Department of Fish and Wildlife, Region 2: Compliance with the California Endangered Species Act; potential permits under Section 2081 of the California Fish and Game Code if take of listed species is likely to occur; Section 1602 streambed alteration agreement if any construction activities occur within the bed or bank of adjacent waterways.
- ▲ California State Office of Historic Preservation: Compliance with Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act (in coordination with the Forest Service).
- ▲ Lahontan Regional Water Quality Control Board: National Pollutant Discharge Elimination System construction stormwater permit (notice of intent to proceed under general construction permit) for disturbance of more than 1 acre, discharge permit for stormwater, and Clean Water Act Section 401 water quality certification or waste discharge requirements.

Local

- ▲ Placer County Air Pollution Control District: Authority to construct (for devices that emit air pollutants); permit to operate; air quality management plan consistency determination.

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